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SUBJECT: NSC SR. DIRECTOR GREEN TALKS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND
THE PARTY'S FUTURE WITH CPV OFFICIAL TA MINH CHAU

11. (U) Summary: Vice Chairman of the CPV Central Committee's External Relations Commission Ta Minh Chau told visiting NSC Senior Director Michael Green that sustained economic development would solve Vietnam's social problems, and that the Party plans to accelerate political and economic reforms when the tenth Party Congress convenes in early 2006. Religious freedom is developing quickly in Vietnam, Chau said, with the number of active worshippers currently in the range of 20 million Vietnamese. Chau also cited the visit of formerly exiled Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh as an example of religious tolerance, and expressed confidence that future religious freedom problems will be solved after the issuance of implementing regulations for the ordinance on religion. Chau said there will be no major policy shifts after the tenth Party Congress, but instead a reaffirmation of Doi Moi and Vietnam's foreign policy. End Summary.

12. (SBU) National Security Council Senior Director for Asia Dr. Michael Green, accompanied by the Ambassador and Poloff, met February 4 with Vice Chairman of the Commission for External Affairs of the Communist Party of Vietnam Ta Minh Chau. Chau provided a lengthy description of Vietnam's economic and social development progress.

13. (SBU) Chau said the Vietnamese economy has changed greatly in the last 15 years, especially in the development of the import/export sector. This development, he said, was validation of the CPV's policy of "promoting synergy within the development of a multi-sectoral economy with help and assistance from outside parties." Export volume and foreign direct investment (FDI) were both high and "all the biggest companies in the world" were represented in Vietnam, Chau commented proudly. "Foreign friends know that Vietnam is a great place to work, and we can see how much investment has improved." This sustained economic development is also the Party's solution to social problems, Chau explained. The growing economy allowed the GVN to commit resources to health care, education, training, culture and especially the effort to develop the agricultural sector and rural areas, which represent more than 80 percent of Vietnam. This had led to great progress in poverty reduction, he added, inviting Dr. Green to "walk around, look around, see how well we have done."

14. (SBU) The Party is not content with economic reforms, Chau told Dr. Green. Its goal is to accelerate political reforms to "bring the government closer to serving the people," he said. To this end, Vietnam had increased the role of the National Assembly and improved the functioning of the government. The CPV is, of course, the "ruling party," Chau observed. This year, the Party will convene congresses at all levels to prepare for the tenth national Party Congress early in the second quarter of 2006 in which it will review 20 years of implementation of the "Doi Moi" (economic renovation) policy. The tenth Party Congress will also "provide guidance on modernization and industrialization of the country towards the goal of making Vietnam a modern, industrial country by 2020," Chau said.

15. (SBU) Vietnam's foreign policy was to "pursue diversification and multilateralization with self-reliance," Chau clarified. Successes of this policy in 2004 included the Asia Europe Meeting summit (ref A) and the Asia Pacific Parliamentarians Forum (ref B). These events are characteristic of Vietnam's "proactive participation in many multilateral organizations," Chau said. The next main multilateral organization Vietnam wants to join is the WTO, he noted, and he asked for Dr. Green's assistance in concluding the WTO negotiations with the United States. All of Vietnam's leaders had visited "main countries" each year, he added. These policies had resulted in an improvement in Vietnam's international prestige, and that in turn led to improvements in bilateral relations. The United States is a good example, Chau said, citing progress in developing trade, economic, political and military relations that have developed over the past ten years. To expand on these relations, the United States and Vietnam should pursue "multilevel, multifaceted exchanges," he recommended.

16. (SBU) The United States and Vietnam would have differences, Chau noted. The most effective way to resolve those is to have dialogues on equal footing "in a safe manner." In 2005, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai would visit the United States, which would serve as proof of the leadership's goodwill. The tenth anniversary of relations would "open a new phase in our bilateral relations." Chau then offered the group a toast, accompanied by warm, sweet Bulgarian sparkling wine.

17. (SBU) Dr. Green thanked Chau for his encouraging overview and said he hopes the United States and Vietnam can succeed in bringing relations to the next level. Strengthening relations would be good for both countries in an international context, he noted, especially considering Vietnam's plans to host the 2006 APEC summit. Both Vietnam and the United States are seeing relations with China improving, as well as improving relations with each other. That in turn would make both countries more attractive to China, thus strengthening and broadening regional cooperation in a "virtuous circle." Vietnam's strategic role in Southeast Asia has more and more significance, Dr. Green said, adding that the United States wants to expand its strategic discussions with Vietnam to "see how best to deepen our role." Regarding Vietnam's WTO accession, he said the United States was "working on it," and noted that the accession was dependent on Vietnam's passing key legislation implementing WTO requirements. An omnibus law covering all of the requirements at once might be an effective way to handle the problem, Dr. Green suggested. Both sides should do their best on this issue to try to provide a positive topic for the Prime Minister's discussions with President Bush, he added. Whatever Vietnam decided, it should make an effort to accelerate economic reforms and thus make Vietnam an investment magnet.

18. (SBU) Religious freedom is a thorny bilateral issue, Dr. Green said. Vietnam and the United States should shift their thinking from an adversarial mindset to a dialogue/learning mindset. By learning from each other, Dr. Green explained, both sides can make progress. The United States' main interest was having a vibrant, strong Vietnam, a regional leader confident in its territorial integrity. The United States looked forward to a win-win dialogue on the issue. Chau agreed that dialogue was necessary, especially since the United States needed to "understand Vietnam better." In previous decades, Chau said, "few Vietnamese" worshipped publicly or followed any specific religion. Now, more than 20 million are classified as "believers." Many churches have been built in recent years to accommodate all of the believers, including in the Central Highlands. "Even (former South Vietnamese Vice President) Nguyen Cao Ky recognized the great progress of religious freedom in Vietnam." Another example is the visit of formerly exiled Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh and several hundred of his followers, which demonstrates how open the Party is to religious believers and to overseas Vietnamese, Chau declared. By conducting dialogue and learning more, the United States would have a better understanding of religious freedom in Vietnam. Dr. Green said he is indeed heartened to see the millions of Vietnamese believers, and believes that where there are problems, he is confident that they will be resolved by the GVN following the implementing regulations on the ordinance on religion.

19. (SBU) Answering Dr. Green's question on the future of the leadership of the party, Chau said that the Party's socioeconomic and other policies are developed long-term and not by any individual or any specific political personality. As a result, "the policies, once developed, have long-term value despite a possible change in leadership." Within the Party, there was a system to develop new members and a system to "change generations" to allow the older leaders to step down. In every institution, Chau explained, there were three generations: the eldest and most experienced, the middle-aged and the youth. The Central Committee of the Party, for example, changes over 1/3 of its membership after each Congress. Personnel changes are routine, he noted, and done "in an appropriate manner in accordance with Constitutional policies to assure consistency and continuity." Those changes did not affect policy, and "one thing I can assure you: the next Party Congress will reaffirm the will of the party to accelerate Doi Moi and foreign policy," he stressed.

110. (U) Bio note: Ta Minh Chau, Vice Chairman, CPV External Affairs Commission, was born in 1949 in Vinh Phuc Province. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in literature in Poland, then later did his Ph.D. in the same area, also in Poland in the 1970s. Chau is a poet, and currently a member of Vietnam Association of Writers. Chau has composed and published several sets of poems, and translated Polish poems. He came back to Vietnam in (approximately) 2002 after serving in the Vietnamese Embassy in Poland as Ambassador. Within the Commission, Chau was previously the

director of the Baltic and Eastern Europe Department, Personnel Department, and Assistant Chairman of CPV's External Affairs Commission before he became Vice Chairman in 2003 (est). Chau appears to understand some English, but he does not use it, beyond a few polite phrases, in his meetings.

110. (U) Dr. Green cleared this message.

MARINE